

ANATOMY OF AN EFFECTIVE COVER LETTER

***The format below is “full block,” but other business letter formats may be used. The cover letter can be attached as a PDF file if transmitted electronically. If mailed, use resume paper and matching envelopes with typed addresses.**

Appropriate (conservative) Letterhead or:

Street Address
City, State & Zip

Date (spelled out)

[Mr./Ms.] and Full Name of Targeted Individual – OR – Name and Title/Degree (e.g., Jane Smith, Esq.)
Complete Title (if known)
Entire Name of the Firm, Agency or Organization
Complete Address (street, city, zip)

Dear Mr./Ms./Judge [last name]:

Opening Paragraph/Positioning Statement: Be concise in explaining: (1) who you are; (2) your objective; (3) your connection or relevance to the position; and, if applicable, (4) the name of a contact. For example, “I am a first year student at American University Washington College of Law with an interest in obtaining a summer position as a law clerk/legal intern at.... Given my science background, I am drawn to the firm/organization’s intellectual property practice, and plan to return to New Jersey when I graduate.... Mr. Cardozo suggested I contact you directly.” *Exercise professional creativity in using all or some of these elements to express your uniqueness and to motivate the reader to read your enclosed resume.*

Heart of the Letter: This section should be no longer than two paragraphs and should convey relevant: (1) credentials (overall grades and/or upward trend); (2) accomplishments, including academic (law school, other graduate, and/or undergraduate) or otherwise; (3) honors and awards (academic, military, civic, etc.); (4) critical reasoning, research, and writing skills (acquired before and during law school); (5) experience in the field (academic and practical); and (6) a demonstrated commitment to the overall objectives and philosophy of the organization. These factors should be integrated with elements of the offered or desired position, thus making your ability to effectively contribute to the organization readily apparent to the reader. *Most employers consider cover letters to be indicative of the author’s research and writing abilities and a reflection of his/her level of commitment to the organization. Perfection and a personalized approach are expected.*

Closing Paragraph: In addition to a simple “Thank you for your consideration,” the closing can be used for a follow-up campaign. For example, “I will be in Trenton early next month and will contact you prior to my visit with the hope that we can schedule a time to meet.” If not already noted, refer to the documents that accompany the letter (resume, transcript, etc.) If using a return address instead of letterhead, a phone number and email address should be included in this paragraph.

“Sincerely,” “Sincerely yours,” or “Very truly yours,”

[Signature if mailing]

Typed Name

Enclosure(s)